

Trek 2000: Sixteen Days on the Bay Circuit Trail

By DICK ROTHSCHILD

When I announced that I intended to hike from Duxbury, around Boston, to Newburyport in sixteen days, friends refrained from blurting out, "have you gone completely out of your mind?" But their incredulous looks, head scratching and words of warning told me that was exactly what was on their minds.

What lures a septuagenarian in so-so shape to throw caution to the wind and sign up for a 200 mile walk? I can answer that. While helping with local publicity for TREK 2000, a celebratory walk of the entire Bay Circuit Trail, I had fallen in love with the adventure of a trail through forests and fields that would take me from my home town all the way to the water's edge on Plum Island. And here was an opportunity to help call attention to a superb recreational facility literally in everyone's back yard.

Still the physical challenge seemed daunting. The question of whether or not I had the stamina to see it through dogged me, right up to the sign-up deadline. In the end it was Alan French who convinced me to give it a try. French, the head of the Bay

Circuit Alliance, the Trek sponsors, was infectiously enthusiastic about the trail and calmly reassuring about my ability to walk it. Alan and his wife Mary proved supportive and inspiring trek leaders.

Charles Elliot II first envisaged The Bay Circuit Trail as an outer 'emerald necklace' around Boston, in 1929, hardly an auspicious year for a new enterprise. So the trail concept slept as soundly as Rip Van Winkle for 60 years until awakened in 1990 by the formation of the Bay Circuit Alliance. The Alliance, a statewide grass roots volunteer organization began working to acquire open spaces and easements to connect properties along the intended route. Over the past decade, with Al French's help, an average of fifteen miles of trail a year have been added. Today over 170 miles of trail have been dedicated, and completion is within sight.

The plan of TREK 2000 was to walk 10 to 15 miles each day from designated starting to finishing points. A leader from each of the more than forty plus communities through which we would pass was to meet us on the trail, guide us through his/her section and then hand us on



Leaders, through-trekkers, and day trekkers on an abandoned rail line which will become part of the Bay Circuit Trail.

to the next leader. Day trippers were encouraged to join the trek as it passed through their community or for as long as they liked. On any particular day fifteen to forty day hikers joined leaders Al and Mary French and four of us through-trekkers.

Drivers and vehicles were provided by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management (DEM). Their mission was to transport duffels for the through trekkers, shuttle the through-trekkers between daily starting/finishing points and overnight accommodations, and bring lunch 'fixings' to on-trail locations. Coordination proved challenging.

Through-trekkers could sign-up in advance for lunch supplies at \$5 per day and opt for overnight accommodations en route ranging from tenting, to camp cabins, motels, and private homes. Day hikers were supposed to make their own transportation and lunch arrangements.

Each day began with a reading of the proclamation by the Massachusetts Legislature commending Trek 2000 and a greeting by State or local officials. Often we were also met

by television crews and newspaper reporters.

The day trippers who joined us were of all sizes, shapes, ages and degrees of fitness. A few peeled off after only an hour or two on the trail while others stayed with us for two or three days. Our ranks swelled on weekends. The most remarkable of the day hikers was an elderly couple, Barbara and Gill who commuted almost daily from their digs in the shadow of Fenway Park. Seemingly thin and frail, they proved to be among the strongest hikers. Both had patches on their well worn day packs showing they had previously hiked 2000 miles on the Appalachian Trail.

Of the four through-trekkers who made it all the way from Duxbury to Newburyport, three were women.

Judy had just retired as a lab technician and appeared to be launching her second career as a long distance trekker. Like Barbara and Gill, Judy commuted daily, between her home in Weymouth, adding hours of driving to arduous days. She was determined to make it on her own two feet from Duxbury to Plum Island, come hell or high water. With khakis tucked

into her socks, and the day's trail map clutched in her left hand, her determined, forward-leaning face framed in a rakish outback hat, Judy pushed on with a quick, sure-footed pace.

Martha, a diminutive, well upholstered brunette had chosen the TREK for a two week vacation from her work as a realtor in Andover. She was the most completely equipped of the through-trekkers. When we arrived at our first motel I saw Martha shuttle five huge bags of gear to her room. (I, however, am hardly one to criticize. When Bob, our first DEM driver struggled to lift my huge Land's End duffel onto the van he asked, "what the devil have you got in this thing?") Martha had recurring foot problems along the way. When she removed her shoes and socks to change them at a lunch break on the third day, I was appalled to see a patchwork of corn plasters, molefoam and moleskin from her toes to her heels. Late in the game, Martha shucked her hiking boots and finished the trek in a pair of Tevas.

Feet were the focus of pas-

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Trek 2000 - Pat Loring, Dick Rothschild and Carol Loring about to get underway on the trail from Moose Hill Reservation.

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sionate discussions between the through-trekkers.

Each had his or her own firmly held beliefs about socks, shoes, toes, toenails, hot spots, blisters and bandages.

The most colorful of the thru-trekkers was Marylou from Walpole. Only the small braid hanging like a watch fob on one side of her long white hair and her unexpected melodic warblings gave early hints of the free spirit inside her sturdy body. Though Marylou was an English tutor, amateur botanist, choir singer, trail steward and tennis player, she had found time to trek in China and Nepal and was already planning new adventures. Unlike Judy and Martha who were reluctant to discuss physical problems, Marylou was always ready to provide an update on the status of her allergies, lactose intolerance, or fleshy tender feet.

At twilight, bone weary but elated, we trudged down Plum Island's darkening beach and dipped our hands ceremoniously into the cool ocean water. At that moment I experienced mixed emotions: the deep satisfaction of completing the trek... and grateful anticipation of a long hot bath.

Along the trail we experienced places of extraordinary beauty: the slate waters of Hanson's Wompatuck Pond framed in crimson swamp maples and carmine tupelos; hoary grey cedars standing guard over the Great Cedar Swamp at Indian Crossing. From King Phillip's Outlook, Rocky Narrows Outlook and Canoe Landing in Sherborn we were treated to breathtaking views of the river Charles, a thick bodied, blue-green serpent slithering its way through tall grasses to far off Boston. In a Westford forest we found ancient stoneworks of historic grist and fulling mills and ghostlike remains of Ebenezer Wood's pencil factory. At Fort

Hill Cemetery we were moved by Paul Tsongas' touchingly simple gravestone overlooking the Concord. Below Lowell, we walked for miles along the ripped banks of the swift and mighty Merrimack, then slipped through Andover's cool, fragrant hemlock groves.

Other highlights were a leisurely fireside dinner in Longfellow's Wayside Inn in Concord with Andy Wolf fiddling, singing ballads and reading from Whitman's *Song of The Open Road*, a pot luck dinner in Sherborn's Town Hall topped off with Betty Bowse's homemade apple crisp and Al French's lusty accordion playing.

On the sixteenth day we

by 4 p.m. reached the Spencer-Pierce-Little Farm where we were toasted with champagne. Then it was on to Joppa Flats where the final ceremony took place, with Andy Wolf leading the way, fiddling.

At twilight, bone weary but elated, we trudged down Plum Island's darkening beach and dipped our hands ceremoniously into the cool ocean water. At that moment I experienced mixed emotions: the deep satisfaction of completing the trek, gladness at having been able to help publicize the Bay Circuit Trail and grateful anticipation of a long hot bath.

Dick Rothschild is a Duxbury resident and freelance writer on health and fitness.



Trekkers steady themselves with poles while crossing a rickety log bridge.